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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH WORKS TO CONTROL TUBERCULOSIS
March 24 is World Tuberculosis Day

(RICHMOND, Va.)—On March 24, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) will join organizations around the globe to recognize World TB Day. The day is aimed at mobilizing support and strengthening commitment in the fight to eliminate tuberculosis (TB), one of the world's deadliest diseases. World TB Day commemorates the date in 1882 when Dr. Robert Koch announced his discovery of the TB bacterium.

TB is an airborne disease that is acquired through prolonged, close contact with a person who has contagious, active TB disease. TB disease usually affects the lungs, but can also affect other parts of the body, such as the brain, kidneys or spine. Active TB disease can be fatal if it is not properly treated.

"Many people think that tuberculosis is a disease of the past. However, it remains a public health concern today," said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. "TB control is a priority in Virginia. We continue to focus our efforts on screening, detecting and treating all TB cases."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one-third of the world's population is infected with tuberculosis. In 2005, VDH reported 355 active TB cases, an increase over 2004, when 329 cases were reported. TB remains a significant public health concern in Virginia, which has a rate of 4.7 cases of TB per 100,000 people.

Most people who breathe in TB bacteria and become infected have strong enough immune systems to stop it from developing into active TB disease. However, the bacteria remain alive in the body and can become active later if the infection is not treated. Each year, 9 million people around the world become sick with TB disease.

Many people who have become infected with TB bacteria never develop active TB disease. However, some may be more likely to develop active TB disease than others. According to the CDC, people at risk for developing active TB disease include:

- people with HIV infection,
- people who became infected with TB bacteria in the last 2 years,
- babies and young children,
- people who inject illegal drugs,
- people who are sick with other diseases that weaken the immune system,
- elderly people, and
- people who were not treated correctly for TB in the past.

(more)

The VDH Division of Disease Prevention supports local health departments and other medical providers in the prevention, surveillance and treatment of TB. It offers continuing education programs for health care providers and the general public. As part of this year's World TB Day observance, the division will offer a training program on current TB control practices for nurses across the Commonwealth.

For more information about TB, contact the Division of Disease Prevention's hotline at (800) 533-4148 or visit www.vdh.virginia.gov/std.

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